

# Political Autonomy, Factionalism, and Economic Survival: Indigenous Governance in Huaquechula, New Spain (1535-1735)

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## ABSTRACT

After the conquest of Mexico, the Spanish Crown was faced with several challenges. The first was to balance the economic imperative to exploit its indigenous subjects with the moral obligation to protect them. The second was how to govern them. The creation of two republics—one Spanish, one Indian, both subordinate to the Crown—gave indigenous peoples the limited right to govern themselves, which could result in factional conflict as they struggled to survive, not only politically, but economically. Based on archival documents, this article illustrates this relationship by way of an in-depth examination of two examples—one from the late 1500s, the other from the early 1700s—from Huaquechula, located in the fertile Valley of Atlixco, Mexico. This article demonstrates that the participation of indigenous peoples in New Spain's politico-legal system contributed to the colony's social transformation.

**Key words:** Traditional rule, town councils, indigenous elections, land and labor, town revenues, compositions.

*Autonomía política, faccionalismo y supervivencia económica:  
la gobernanza indígena en Huaquechula, Nueva España (1535-1735)*

## RESUMEN

Después de la conquista de México, la Corona española se encontró con varios retos. El primero era mantener el equilibrio entre el imperativo económico de explotar a los indígenas sometidos y la obligación moral de protegerlos. El segundo era gobernarlos. La creación de dos repúblicas—una española y otra indígena, ambas subordinadas a la Corona—le dio a la población indígena el derecho limitado de gobernarse a sí mismos, que podía resultar en un conflicto entre facciones al esforzarse en sobrevivir, no sólo política sino económicamente. A partir de documentos de archivo, este artículo muestra esta relación mediante un examen profundo de dos ejemplos—uno de finales del siglo XVI y el otro de principios del siglo XVII—de Huaquechula, comunidad ubicada en el fértil valle de Atlixco. El artículo demuestra que la participación del pueblo indígena en el sistema político legal de la Nueva España contribuyó a la transformación social de la Colonia.

**Palabras claves:** Gobierno tradicional, cabildos, elecciones indígenas, tierra y mano de obra, bienes de comunidad, composiciones.

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. The Indian Republic. 3. Early Indigenous Rulers of Cuauhtuechollan. 4. «Rebellious Indians». 5. «Carried Away by Passion». 6. Summary and Conclusion. 7. Documental References. 8. Bibliographical References.

## 1. Introduction

Over the years, the effects of Spanish-style governance on the indigenous peoples of New Spain have been a matter of debate. Some studies conclude that the prehispanic politico-legal system underwent rapid hispanization (Borah 1983; Gibson 1964; Me-

negus 1999). Others, augmented by indigenous-language sources, argue that, in spite of structural changes, prehispanic forms and functions of government persisted well into the colonial period (Cline 1986; Haskett 1991; Lockhart 1992; Martínez 1984). Still others suggest that, by drawing on both prehispanic and Spanish beliefs and practices, indigenous peoples «interacted with and helped shape an evolving colonial legal system» (Kellogg 1995: xxxi; see also González-Hermosillo 2001: 19; Kellogg 2010a: 230).

After the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards and their indigenous allies in 1521, the Crown was faced with several challenges. The first was how to balance the economic imperative to exploit its indigenous subjects, in their role as direct producers, with the moral obligation to protect them from arbitrary abuse (Taylor 1979: 160). The second was how to govern them. The Crown attempted to achieve this balance by dispensing royal justice through the legal system (Owensby 2008: 247). Traditionally, it had governed by negotiating with competing interest groups which, in New Spain, consisted of two republics –Spanish and Indian– each with the limited right to govern itself. Negotiation, however, was asymmetrical, not a discussion between parties with equal power (Cunill 2012: 393), as Baber (2010: 20) implies. As the Crown began to consolidate its power over its new colony, it also began to challenge that of *encomenderos* (Spaniards who were granted *encomiendas* or the right to indigenous tribute and labor), the mendicant orders, and even *caciques* (indigenous rulers) (Cunill 2012: 399) by allowing indigenous *macehuales* (commoners) easier access to colonial courts to resolve disputes, both among themselves and with outsiders. At the same time, easier access to colonial courts disrupted the balance of political power within indigenous towns (Kellogg 2010b: 3), leading to factionalism. Who among them had the right to govern, on what basis –traditional rule or elected office– and to what end? In some cases, the end was not only to exercise their limited right to political autonomy (Owensby 2008: 225), but to protect their economic survival. Given these conditions, it may be instructive to recall Bujra's (1973: 133) argument that

«[factional] processes are in a dialectical relationship with other social and political processes going on both within and outside the community being studied».

With certain modifications, her (1973: 150) discussion of such a relationship –which she identifies with the modern state– can be adapted not only to New Spain, but to its social transformation.

Based on archival documents from New Spain's early colonial period,<sup>1</sup> this article examines the case of Huaquechula, a town with deep prehispanic roots located in the fertile Valley of Atlixco in the southwest of the present state of Puebla. I suggest that the limited political autonomy that the Spanish Crown granted to indigenous towns such as Huaquechula could lead to factionalism which, in some cases, was directly related to their economic survival. I begin by discussing the concept of the Indian republic to highlight the change in governance that the Crown imposed on indigenous peoples and its potential for factionalism. I then give a brief overview of Huaquechula's leaders and rulers from prehispanic times to the early colonial period

<sup>1</sup> The archival documents cited in this article are from the Archivo General de la Nación and the Archivo de la Tenencia de la Tierra en la Provincia de Puebla (Biblioteca Nacional, Fondo Reservado) in Mexico City.

to explore the possibility of continuity of its traditional ruling elite and its implications for economic survival. In the two examples that follow, I illustrate the relationship between political autonomy, factionalism, and economic survival in Huaquechula. The first example from the late 1500s involved a factional dispute that arose as a result of Spanish interference in issues of land and labor. The second from the early 1700s involved a factional dispute over the office of *gobernador* (governor) and the misappropriation of *bienes de comunidad* (town revenues). I conclude by summarizing my findings as they relate to the social transformation of New Spain.

## 2. The Indian Republic

Faced with the challenge of how it would govern its indigenous subjects, the Crown decided upon the creation of two republics: One Spanish, and one Indian. As long as Indian law was not contrary to natural and canon law, each would be self-governing, but not entirely autonomous from Crown rule. Because the Indian republic was to conform to Spanish notions of «proper polity» (Borah 1983: 34), Spanish-style *cabildos* (town councils), each composed of an elected Indian *gobernador* and other officials, were established in each *cabecera* (head town). According to the Crown, Indians were free «to elect whom they think best» (Owensby 2008: 217).

The process of holding elections was not new to indigenous peoples. What was new was the expectation that they would be held on a regular basis. Although most elections were held without incident, some gave rise to ongoing electoral disputes as factions competed for control of *cabildos* (Haskett 1991: 27).<sup>2</sup> Factional disputes could arise for a variety of reasons (Castro 1998; Gibson 1964; Haskett 1991) –the candidate had personal shortcomings; those who voted did not have the right to do so; an election had not been held at the proper time or in the proper place; a *gobernador* was in arrears of tribute payments. To complicate matters, Spaniards –including local-level administrators, clerics, and settlers– often tried to influence the outcomes of elections in order to further their own interests.

Drawing on Bujra (1973), Brumfiel (1994: 5) suggests that, because the leaders of factions tend to be elite members of –in this case– indigenous society, they compete for «resources and positions of power and prestige» based on their «relative legitimacy», not on the «merits of substantively different social programs». In a similar manner, Gibson (1964: 178) notes that many factional disputes appear to have been based on the «loyalty of intimates and family rather than on political policies or ideological principles». As such, their goals were unlikely to challenge the power structure of colonial society. Instead, indigenous peoples became dependent on colonial courts to resolve their disputes (Kellogg 1995: xxiv). In fact, as Brumfiel (1994: 5) states, because factionalism is «non-revolutionary in intent», it is often dismissed as «non-revolutionary in consequence». Conclusions such as these are what likely led Kurtz

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<sup>2</sup> See García Martínez (1987: 198-199) for examples of conflicts between *caciques* and *gobernadores* in the Sierra Norte of Puebla and Hoekstra (1993: 212-222) for examples of conflicts between *caciques* and nobles in Tecamachalco and Cuauhtinchan, and between commoners and nobles and their factions in Tlaxcala, Huejotzingo, Tepexi, Tochimilco, and Huaquechula. All are located in the Puebla-Tlaxcala region.

(2001: 111) to comment that, because factions proved to be less «dynamic» to the political process than they were initially thought to be, anthropological interest in them eventually waned.

Yet elections remained important to indigenous peoples because they «determined who would be entrusted with seeing to a *pueblo*'s [town's] survival» (Owensby 2008: 224) and, more specifically, to its economic survival. Land was, after all, the «distilled essence of local identity» (Owensby 2008: 28). Thus, instead of describing factionalism as «revolutionary», whether in intent or in consequence, it might be better described as having the potential to be transformative, not in the sense of the «institutionalization» of conflict groups (Bujra 1973: 145), nor only of the daily lives of indigenous peoples (Kellogg 1995: xxxii), but of society itself (Brumfiel 1994: 4). Within the colonial context, indigenous peoples «did not seek to transcend their circumstances so much as they sought to *transform* them» (Owensby 2008: 308, emphasis added).

### 3. Early Indigenous Rulers of Cuauhtuechollan

Because the ethnohistorical sources on Cuauhtuechollan are fragmentary, only some of its Postclassic period (AD 900/1000-1521) leaders or rulers, whether mythical or historical, are identified by name.<sup>3</sup> After its forcible relocation from Atlixco in AD 1443, it appears to have been –or to have become– a simple, one-*tlatoani* (ruler) *altepetl* (Lockhart 1992: 20), consisting of various *calpolli* (Asselbergs 2004: 301-302). In this, Cuauhtuechollan differed from many other cities and towns in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley that were organized –in whole or in part– on the basis of *teccalli* (noble houses) (Dyckerhoff 1990: 41-42), including Tlaxcala (Gibson 1952), Huejotzingo (Prem 1988), Cuauhtinchan (Reyes García 1988), Tepeaca (Martínez 1984), and Santiago Tecali (Chance 2000). However, not until the early 16th century does tracing the descendants of Huaquechula's prehispanic ruling elite become possible.<sup>4</sup>

In 1524, Huaquechula was one of several towns given in *encomienda* to Jorge de Alvarado. By 1531, the city of Puebla de los Ángeles had been founded, in part to

<sup>3</sup> For the Early Postclassic period (AD 900/1000-1200), see Muñoz Camargo (1998: §63), Motolinía (1995: 5), and *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (1989: §28). For the Middle Postclassic period (AD 1200-1430), see Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1965, tomo I: 136, 144). For the Late Postclassic period (AD 1430-1521), see Asselbergs (2004: 51, 55) who, based on the 16th-century *Genealogía Cuauhtuechollan-Macuilxochitepec*, suggests that nine of the individuals depicted were the founders of the nine *barrios* (prehispanic *calpolli*–subdistricts of an *altepetl*, or city-state) of Cuauhtuechollan in AD 1443. However, the *Suma de visitas*, compiled around 1550 (Paso y Troncoso 1905, tomo I: 111-112 [Guacachula, fol. 81]), notes that Huaquechula had only four *barrios*, and 11 *estancias* (outlying villages) not subject to it. After Hernán Cortés and his men arrived in the Valley of Atlixco in 1520, the Cuauhtuecholtecas were among various indigenous groups that allied themselves with the Spaniards to wrest their town from the Triple Alliance allies who were garrisoned there. Cortés (1993: 89, 93) did not identify the *señor* (lord) of Cuauhtuechollan by name, but García Granados (1953: 1, 109) identifies him as Calcozámētēl.

<sup>4</sup> In prehispanic times, Nahuas bore only a single personal name. With the mass baptisms performed by mendicant friars in the early 16th century, each individual received a Christian name, but often retained his/her indigenous name as well (Lockhart 1992: 118-120). By 1550, indigenous peoples were adopting Spanish surnames and, by the mid-17th century, indigenous surnames had all but disappeared (Lockhart 1992: 127). Early on, indigenous peoples adopted the honorific «*don*», which they equated more with achieved than ascribed status (Lockhart 1992: 126).

reduce the power of *encomenderos* by creating a class of independent Spanish farmers who were assisted temporarily by «Indians of service» (Hirschberg 1979: 241).<sup>5</sup> In 1535, the Crown granted Huaquechula's *caciques*, *señores*, and *principales* (nobles) –among them don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua and don Alonso de Meneses Xiloxochicatl– protection from possible Spanish encroachment on their resources (AGN, Tierras, Vol. 2683, Exp. 4: 3r). In 1539, the Franciscan, fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía) (1995: 93), described how he met «Juan», Huaquechula's «most important» indigenous noble after its lord, don Martín [Cortés Xochitlahua].<sup>6</sup> And, in 1545, Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza awarded a *merced* (royal grant) to don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua, the ruler and *señor natural* [native lord] of Huaquechula, and to «the rest of [its] *caciques*, *tequitlatos* [tribute-collectors], and *macehuales*», specifying the boundaries of the resources only alluded to in 1535 (AGN, Tierras, Vol. 2683, Exp. 4: 1r).

The extent to which the political power of the prehispanic ruling elite was replaced by that of the Spanish-style *cabildo* in the central highlands of Mexico also has been a matter of debate. Some scholars argue that they retained their power well into the colonial period (Haskett 1991; Lockhart 1992; Martínez 1984). Others argue that, soon after the Spanish conquest, they lost their power to those who had no hereditary claim to it (Gibson 1964; Menegus 1991; Pérez Zevallos 1984), including *macehuales* –or, as López Serrelangue (1965: 96) refers to them, «nobles advenedizos [upstart nobles]». In part, it appears that, in those regions characterized by a «lack of political, economic, and social cohesion» and «the most rapid and intense» Spanish presence, the *señorío* (traditional lordship) was quickly replaced by the *cabildo* (Menegus 1991: 100, 1999: 616; see also Kellogg 2010a: 230; Perkins 2005a: 29; Prem 1988: 231).

Such characteristics, however, apply only in part to Huaquechula. With regard to its cohesion, Cuauhquechollan appears to have been an ethnically homogeneous (Nahuatl) *altepetl* that twice rebelled against domination by the Triple Alliance (Clavijero 2003: 192; Cortés 1993: 93). Although one of the earliest references to a functioning *cabildo* in Huaquechula is from 1576 (AGN, Indios, Vol. 1, Exp. 73: 28v), after which references to *caciques* are few in number, several Spanish surnames such as Cortés –likely descendants of Cuauhquechollan's *señor natural*– as well as Meneses and Morales –possible descendants of its *calpolli* leaders– appear more often than do any others in the highest-ranking offices of the *cabildo*. How, then, does one account for surnames that appear only occasionally or, sometimes, only once in the archival documents on Huaquechula? The literature suggests that *macehuales* –in the sense of commoners<sup>7</sup>– seldom were elected to the highest-ranking offices of the *cabildo*

<sup>5</sup> After the epidemic of 1545-1548, the temporary system of Indians of service was replaced by the *repartimiento* (obligatory rotational labor) system. However, only after the epidemic of 1576-1581 did the Huaquechultecas begin to report labor abuse by Spanish settlers. The *repartimiento* system was terminated in 1633.

<sup>6</sup> The Franciscan presence in Huaquechula dates from around 1529 to 1627. Among the *calpolli* leaders whose names appear on a fragment of Nahuatl text that accompanies the early 16th-century *Mapa Circular de Cuauhquechollan* (Asselbergs 2004: 303) was also «Juan» (surname illegible). Because *calpolli* were ranked relative to one another, this may explain his importance, although his name is not included among those of the *caciques*, *señores*, and *principales* who requested Crown protection of their resources in 1535. Two other *calpolli* leaders were don Hernando Cortés and Andrés Xiloxochicatl.

<sup>7</sup> Martínez (1984: 162-163) explains that the term *macehuales* can be translated either as «commoners» (a social group) or as «subjects» (a social relation). In prehispanic times, lesser rulers were considered to be the

(Horn 1997: 46, 58; Martínez 1984: 156, 160). Thus, it might be more accurate to say that the prehispanic order was disrupted less by commoners than by different *factions* –with which commoners were affiliated– gaining access to political power (Cruz 2004: 158; García Martínez 1987: 189; Martínez 1984: 140).

With regard to the Spanish presence, the *altepetl* of Cuauhquechollan had been awarded as a whole in *encomienda*, not divided among Spanish settlers, and it seems to have been minimally affected by the process of *congregación* (congregation) of indigenous peoples into nucleated settlements that would later give rise to secessions of *sujetos* (subject towns) from *cabeceras*, as occurred in other parts of New Spain (Dehouve 1984; Perkins 2005b).<sup>8</sup> At first, Spanish encroachment on its boundaries was slow. It was not until the typhus epidemic of 1576-1581 that the fertile Valley of Atlixco began to attract the attention of Spanish farmers and ranchers who, in 1579, founded the Villa de Carrión, 32 kilometers to the southwest of Puebla de los Ángeles. As the indigenous population declined, Spanish settlers attempted to acquire more land and demanded even more indigenous laborers to work it. Huaquechula was not exempt from such pressures but, because it remained partly in private *encomienda* until at least the late 1600s, its *encomenderos* may have protected it from Spanish encroachment which would have reduced the amount of tribute to which they were entitled. A similar phenomenon occurred in several towns in the Sierra Norte of Puebla (García Martínez 1987: 238 n. 49, 252-254).

#### 4. «Rebellious Indians»

If the first example of factionalism is any indication, the establishment of Spanish-style government in Huaquechula got off to a less than promising start. Early in 1589, Viceroy Álvaro Manrique de Zúñiga approved the appointment of don Juan de Tovar, «Indian noble» of nearby Ocopetlayuca, to the office of *juez-gobernador* (judge-governor) of Huaquechula (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 201: 63v). According to Lockhart (1992: 33-34), it was not uncommon during the early colonial period for an indigenous noble who was familiar with both indigenous and Spanish forms of government to be appointed to such an office to settle disputes. In fact, the dispute described below likely served as the catalyst for the viceroy's inquiry. On October 17, 1589, the *gobernador*, don Graviel de Morales, *alcaldes* (councilmen), and *principales* of Huaquechula reported to the viceroy that the *alcalde mayor* (governor) of Izúcar –who, throughout the dispute, remained unnamed– was collecting the rent on town lands that they had leased to Spaniards.<sup>9</sup> Although the viceroy ordered the *alcalde mayor* to

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subjects of more powerful ones and, during the colonial period, the indigenous elite often referred to themselves as the subjects of the Spanish Crown.

<sup>8</sup> To date, only one record of secession has been found—that of Santa Ana Coatepec, a *sujeto* of Huaquechula (ANG, Indios, Vol. 64, Exp. 149: 94-11r) in 1771.

<sup>9</sup> Leasing lands was one of various sources of *bienes de comunidad* that were kept in a *caja de comunidad* (community treasury). The Crown introduced the *caja* system in 1554 to defray the costs of town expenditures (Haskett 1991: 63).

explain why he was interfering in affairs that did not concern his office (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 21: 5v), he continued to do so for more than a year.

A month later, on November 17, the viceroy reported that he had reviewed the investigation that don Juan Ramírez de Arellano, *juez de comisión* (provisional judge), carried out at the request of the *gobernador* and *macehuales* of Huaquechula into (unspecified) charges that they had laid against four *principals*—don Pablo Hurtado, don Juan de Texada, Felipe Inocencio, and Estevan de Castañeda. In order that the town remain peaceful, the viceroy ordered that the accused were not to hold, nor be elected to, offices of the republic (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 79: 24r). Only a week later, the viceroy reminded the *alcalde mayor* of Izúcar that, because of the charges brought against the aforementioned «rebellious and malicious Indians», they had been suspended from office. Apparently, however, the *alcalde mayor* was friends with the accused, and was now carrying out investigations of the *gobernador*, *alcaldes*, and *regidores* (councilmen) «out of vengeance». The viceroy ordered the *alcalde mayor* not to «disquiet said Indians» nor to carry out further investigations of them (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 106: 34r), but it appears that the *alcalde mayor* was not the only one who interfered in Huaquechula's affairs. In a second document from 1589, but lacking day and month, the viceroy issued «another» order prohibiting judges, priests, and friars from attending elections and preventing the Indians of Huaquechula from holding them freely (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 154: 50r). The problems continued.

On March 1, 1590, Viceroy Luis de Velasco I ordered that don Juan de Tovar be allowed to retain the office of *juez-gobernador* of Huaquechula to which he had been appointed, despite the fact that «those from Huaquechula» had opposed it. The viceroy also ordered that three «rebellious Indians»—*gobernador electo* (governor elect) Fabián de Castilla, Miguel de Santiago, and Baltasar Rodríguez— not be allowed to live in Huaquechula without express consent from their *señorio*, «under pain of perpetual exile» (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 305: 94r). Less than a month later, on March 23, the Indians of Huaquechula reported to the viceroy that don Juan Ramírez de Arellano, now *corregidor* (governor) of Ocopetlayuca (recall that, in 1589, he was *juez de comisión*) often sent *alguaciles* (constables) to take Indians of service from Huaquechula to work on the farms in his district. The viceroy ordered the *alcalde mayor* of Izúcar to report on the matter (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 375: 114r). In a second document from 1590, the first page of which is missing, the viceroy repeated his order to the *alcalde mayor* that Ramírez not be allowed to enter Huaquechula except on official business (AGN, Indios, Vol. 5, Exp. 1: 70r). As to don Juan de Tovar, he was transferred to the town of Xochimilco (AGN, Indios, Vol. 3, Exp. 211: 48r).

To summarize the events described above, the viceregal approval of the appointment of a *juez-gobernador* for Huaquechula appears to have occurred as a result of the dispute over the collection of rent on town lands between *gobernador* don Graviel de Morales and the *alcalde mayor* of Izúcar who, at least initially, had support from a small faction of *principales*. That the *juez-gobernador* happened to be from Ocopetlayuca was probably not a coincidence. He may well have colluded with—or been persuaded to collude with—the *corregidor*, also from Ocopetlayuca, to take indigenous laborers to that jurisdiction. Ongoing opposition from the Huaquechultecas, including their attempt to elect their own *gobernador*, suggests that they were well

aware of what was occurring. The problem eventually was resolved after the viceroy ordered that the *corregidor* not be allowed to abuse the *repartimiento* system. As to the *juez-gobernador*, perhaps he had outlived his usefulness to the *corregidor*. Given the repeated complaints of outside interference in Huaquechula's political and economic affairs, it is unlikely that the *alcalde mayor* of Izúcar was unaware of what had been occurring. In fact, he, himself, may have colluded with those from Ocopetlayuca.

From 1593 until well beyond 1602, when Huaquechula was transferred from the jurisdiction of Izúcar to that of Atlixco, the town was fairly quiet or, at least, the documents reveal only sporadic disputes over the election of indigenous *gobernadores* or their actions, and occasional disputes with Spaniards over access to resources and abuse of labor. By 1633, the *repartimiento* system had been terminated and, by 1643, the process of Spanish *composiciones* (compositions)<sup>10</sup> had been completed. Until at least 1696, Huaquechula was still partly a private encomienda (Gerhard 1993: 56) and, until the second half of the 1700s –possibly when it reverted in whole to the Crown– it managed to keep its lands intact (Vigil 1992: 52).

## 5. «Carried Away by Passion»

The second example of factionalism involves a dispute internal to Huaquechula over the election of *gobernadores*, two of whom –don Miguel Cortés y Meneses and don Francisco Cortés de Morales– may have been related (Table 1).<sup>11</sup>

The dispute began after don Miguel was elected as *gobernador* in December of 1715 (AGN, Indios, Vol. 40, Exp. 14: 17r-18r). His election was contested by Miguel de la Mendoza, don Miguel de los Reyes, don Salvador de la Cruz, and «other natives» who claimed to have re-elected don Francisco and requested that the staff of office be returned to him. After an investigation into the matter, which revealed nothing

<sup>10</sup> Implemented in 1591 and completed by 1645, the process of *composición* allowed Spaniards who could not show valid title to the lands they possessed to be awarded them if they made a monetary contribution to the Crown.

<sup>11</sup> Because the archival documentation on Huaquechula is fragmentary, it does not allow for the detailed reconstruction of genealogies or *cabildo* office-holders as is possible, for example, for Cuernavaca (Haskett 1991), Tepeaca (Martínez 1984), Santiago Tecali (Chance 1998), Tepexí de la Seda (Cruz 2008; Hoekstra 2010), or Santa Cruz Tlacotepec (Perkins 2007). However, the reader will recall that, in 1535, don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua and don Alonso de Meneses Xiloxochicatl were referred to as two of the *caciques*, *señores*, and *principales* of Huaquechula and that, in 1545, the former was referred to specifically as its *cacique* and *señor natural*. In the *Mapa Circular de Cuauhuechollan*, don Hernando Cortés and Andrés Xiloxochicatl –probably related to don Alonso de Meneses Xiloxochicatl– were identified as *principales* (Asselbergs 2004: 303). In 1575, don Gabriel Cortés, *cacique* and *principal*, and Benito Cortés, *alcalde*, were witnesses in an unsuccessful attempt to deny a Spaniard his request for a *merced* (AGN, Tierras, Vol. 2708, Exp. 4: 15 ff). In 1589, don Graviel de Morales was the *gobernador* who reported to the viceroy that the *alcalde mayor* of Izúcar was collecting the rent on lands the town had leased to Spaniards. And, in 1619, the Crown awarded a licence to the *cacique*, don Francisco de San Juan, to wear Spanish dress and to ride a horse (AGN, Indios, Vol. 9, Exp. 143: 72v). Lockhart (1992: 123) notes that, because «de San» had been dropped from indigenous surnames by the end of the 16th century, to retain it «created a name of greater resonance, likely to be used by peoples of higher rank». It may be no coincidence, then, that don Francisco de San Juan was the son of a don Felipe Cortés and the grandson of the *cacique* and *señor natural*, don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua.



**Table 1:** Rulers and *cabildo* members, Huaquechula

Year	Name	Title
1535	Don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua Don Alonso de Meneses Xiloxochicatl	<i>Caciques</i> (rulers), lords, nobles
1545	Don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua	<i>Cacique</i> and <i>señor natural</i> (native lord)
<i>Mapa Circular de Cuauhquechollan</i>	«Juan» Don Hernando Cortés Andrés Xiloxochicatl	<i>Calpolli</i> leaders
1575	Don Gabriel Cortés Benito Cortés	<i>Cacique</i> and noble <i>Alcalde</i> (councilman)
1589	Don Graviel de Morales	Governor
1619	Don Francisco de San Juan	<i>Cacique</i> (son of don Felipe Cortés, grandson of don Martín Cortés Xochitlahua)
1716	Don Miguel Cortés y Meneses Don Francisco Cortés de Morales	Governor Past governor

that would detract from don Miguel's suitability as *gobernador*, Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva approved and confirmed his election on March 12, 1716.

By July of 1716, don Miguel had appeared before the viceroy to request that don Francisco be made to account for the *bienes de comunidad* that he had been responsible for during his term in office (AGN, Indios, Vol. 40, Exp. 39: 79r). When his term ended, he turned over to don Miguel only one key to the *caja de comunidad*, none of the revenues, nor the account book.<sup>12</sup> The viceroy ordered don Francisco to appear before the justice of Atlixco to explain himself and to present the account book. If it were the case that he was indebted, in whole or in part, to the town, he was to repay the amount immediately. It was later suggested that don Miguel had reported don Francisco in order to prevent him from being re-elected (AGN, Indios, Vol. 40, Exp. 136: 199r), but there may have been more at stake than this. On December 9, 1716, don Miguel applied to the Real Audiencia for a license to withdraw funds from Huaquechula's *caja* (AGN, Indios, Vol. 40, Exp. 93: 142v) –perhaps to successfully compose two *caballerías* of land on behalf of the *barrio* of San Martín Huaquechula in Izúcar (ATT-PP, Caja 13, Exp. 419: 14f).<sup>13</sup> In doing so, he may have been anticipa-

<sup>12</sup> The document, which provides details of the tribute record for 1714, notes that both the account book and the revenues had been placed in the *caja de comunidad*. To safeguard the revenues, a *caja* typically had three separate locks and keys, the latter held by three separate officials (Gibson 1964: 213). In the case of Huaquechula, the *gobernador* held one key, an *alcalde* the second, and the *escribano* (scribe) the third. After their terms of office ended, they were to hand over the keys to their successors. A town was not allowed to withdraw more than 20 pesos a year from the *caja* without obtaining a license from the *Real Audiencia* (Royal Audience).

<sup>13</sup> Not included in the process of *composición* until 1707 (Vigil 1992: 26), indigenous towns quickly took advantage of it in order to prevent further encroachment on their resources (Ruiz Medrano 2010: 103). One *caballería* was approximately 43 hectares of agricultural land. Although it is uncertain when the *barrio* of San Martín Huaquechula was congregated, the ties between Huaquechula and Izúcar dated back to prehispanic times. In 1520, Cortés (1993: 93) learned that the *señor* of Cuauhquechollan –likely Calcozámētī– had married the daughter of the late *señor* of Itzocán (Izúcar). Because Itzocán now lacked a «*gobernador*», their son was appointed to the position.

ting the eventual recovery of Huaquechula's population<sup>14</sup> and the increasing conflict with Spaniards over what were becoming scarce resources.<sup>15</sup> In 1710, don Francisco also had composed four *caballerías* of land and three *surcos* of water (one *surco* was 6.5 liters of water per second) on behalf of Huaquechula (ATT-PP, Caja 3, Exp. 211: 7v). But, because don Francisco had misappropriated the *bienes de comunidad*, perhaps don Miguel suspected that he had no intention of composing any more resources.

In January of 1717, the factional dispute resumed (AGN, Indios, Vol. 40, Exp. 110: 163r-165v). On behalf of self-proclaimed *gobernador electo* don Diego de los Santos, *regidores* don Juan Bentura, don Miguel de la Cruz, Juan Matías de Silva, and Pasqual de Aguilar, and «other voters, commoners, and natives» of Huaquechula, their lawyer argued that, before the electoral dispute in December of 1715 had been resolved, don Miguel had been handed the staff of office<sup>16</sup> and, «with malicious intent», had removed his clients from office. He then convened «certain natives», who he appointed as *regidores*, and proceeded to hold the election of December of 1716 early. After the *Real Audiencia* had returned his clients to office, they proceeded to hold their election freely and at the appropriate time. Thus, their lawyer requested that, until the present dispute was resolved, the staff of office be handed to someone who was not a member of don Miguel's faction. On behalf of don Miguel, his lawyer argued that, although his client had been elected—legitimately, at the proper time, and without irregularities—to the office of *gobernador* for the current year, some natives of «restless and seditious nature» had tried to nullify the election, using «false and frivolous motives» to depose him and to hand the staff of office to a member of their own faction.

Faced with these conflicting allegations, the viceroy ordered that an investigation into the matter be carried out (AGN, Indios, Vol. 40, Exp. 136: 198r-199v). On February 24, 1717, the *fiscal* (Crown attorney) who had examined the results of the investigation noted that Huaquechula was divided into two factions: that of don Miguel, and that of don Francisco, against whom the *Real Audiencia* had issued an arrest warrant. It was well known, said the *fiscal*, that whenever an election was held, the members of one faction, «carried away by passion», opposed those of the other. The expense of maintaining them in Mexico City during the dispute was causing the «total ruin and destruction» of the *común* (commoners) of Huaquechula. So as not to prolong the dispute which had gone on for a full year, the viceroy reconfirmed the

<sup>14</sup> In 1520, the population of Huaquechula was estimated to be between 10,000 and 12,000 (Cortés 1993: 92). In 1568, it was 10,329 but, by 1595 (14 years after the typhus epidemic of 1576-1581), it had dropped to 5,625 and, by 1646, to 2,922 (Cook and Borah 1979: v. III, 29). In 1681, the population was only 2,000 people (Gerhard 1981: Table I). By 1744, the population was composed of 1,030 Indian families (Villaseñor y Sánchez 1952: t. I, lib. II, cap. XXIII, 348).

<sup>15</sup> In 1706, the *gobernador* of Huaquechula, don Diego de la Cruz, and the *alcalde* of Huilango requested protection of their towns' water source against dispossession by a Spanish *hacendado* (large landowner) (AGN, Mercedes, Vol. 67, Exp. -: 43r-44r). In 1595, the Crown had awarded protection of that same water source to the towns of Huaquechula, Huilango, Atzitzihuacan, Ocopetlayuca, and Tochimilco (AGN, Tierras, Vol. 11 (1a. pte), Exp. 1: 1r-20v). Such requests for protection of resources were common between 1591 and 1610; Tecamachalco requested protection in 1560 and twice in 1591, and Tepeaca in 1561 (Martínez 1994: 201-201, 213-214 notes 23-25).

<sup>16</sup> The staff of office probably was handed to don Miguel during the electoral dispute so that the town was not without a *gobernador* to collect tribute (Castro 1998: 58).

election of don Miguel on April 27, 1717, and imposed «perpetual silence» on his opponents. He ordered that, «under pain of six months in an *obraje* [textile factory]», the members of the opposing faction were to return home and to live «quietly and agreeably». He further ordered that, «under pain of perpetual privation of office», don Miguel was to treat his opponents well, without causing them «harm or vexation».

To summarize the events described above, this dispute seems to have been, on the surface, one over which of the descendants of Huaquechula's traditional ruling elite—or members of their respective factions—would occupy the office of *gobernador*. Beneath the surface, however, it seems to have involved the economic problem of securing resources for Huaquechula and its *barrio* in Izúcar. Because Huaquechula was transferred from the jurisdiction of Izúcar to that of Atlixco in 1602, don Francisco may have been affiliated with Huaquechula proper and don Miguel with its *barrio*. If this were the case, it is possible that the viceregal solution to the factional dispute was only temporary, but the archival record ends here. And, because there is no record of rebuttal from don Francisco in his own defense, the question of what had actually become of the *bienes de comunidad* remains unanswered.

This example appears to be the last prolonged dispute involving Huaquechula until around 1735, when religious orders, such as the Jesuits and the Carmelites, began to purchase *haciendas* (large rural estates) for sugar cane refineries in the region. From that point on, disputes over resources began in earnest.

## 6. Summary and Conclusion

Based on his extensive review of early colonial-period disputes, Borah (1983: 188) concludes that «[many]...were embedded in local politics and factional quarrels, at which a present-day reader of the record can only guess». His conclusion aptly applies to the two examples presented in this article.

Of course, there are differences between the two. The first example from the late 1500s was an internal factional dispute provoked by an external dispute, occurring at a time when land and labor were still highly contested issues between indigenous peoples and Spaniards. Although outside interference in Huaquechula's economic and political affairs was continuous, the Huaquechultecas eventually presented a united front against it. The second example from the early 1700s appears to have been exclusively an internal factional dispute, occurring at a time of relative economic stability in Huaquechula. The *repartimiento* system had come to an end, the *composición* of Spanish land titles had been completed, and indigenous towns had finally been included in the process.

But there are also similarities between the two examples. First, the Huaquechultecas' political autonomy—the right «to elect whom they think best»—was compromised and their economic survival was threatened in both due to direct or indirect pressure by Spaniards. Of necessity, this involved the reliance of the Huaquechultecas on the courts of New Spain to settle disputes that could not be resolved at the local level. Although the outcomes differed—«unity» in the first, «apparent unity» in the second (Bujra 1973: 144)—the goals were the same, that is, to defend their resources.

And in neither case did the courts deny them the right to do so. Second, although the archival documents on Huaquechula are not abundant enough to determine the extent to which its politico-legal system underwent rapid hispanization or persisted in prehispanic form and function, they do suggest some continuity of a prehispanic ruling elite—specifically, descendants of its *tlatoani* and *calpolli* leaders—in the highest-ranking offices of its *cabildo* at least until the second half of the 1700s. Whether through *tlahtocayotl* (lordship) or *gobernadoryotl* (governorship) (Ouweneel 1995), both *caciques* and *gobernadores* could defend communal resources within the context of Spanish legislation (González-Hermosillo 2001: 19). Third, the two examples demonstrate that the interest of indigenous peoples in holding political office did not wane by the late 1500s as Gibson (1964: 192) suggests. On the contrary, their interest was as strong in the early 1700s as it was in the late 1500s.

Located in the fertile Valley of Atlixco, Huaquechula, like other towns in the central highlands, continued to produce a surplus in tribute and labor which made them «indispensable» to the economic success of New Spain (Taylor 1979: 165). Thus, the Crown attempted to balance the economic imperative to exploit its indigenous subjects and the moral imperative to protect them. It did so by governing through negotiation between parties with unequal power—the Spanish and Indian republics—and by offering indigenous peoples easier access to colonial courts to resolve disputes. But their participation in New Spain's politico-legal system could disrupt the balance of power within towns and lead to factionalism. At the local level, they used the electoral system as a «flexible instrument» (Gibson 1964: 178) in deciding who had the right to govern and on what basis, and were «astute enough» (Haskett 1991: 50) to know when to time disputes to their political advantage. Within the wider context, they used the colonial politico-legal system as a «practical and moral resource» (Owensby 2008: 88) against arbitrary abuse by Spaniards.

Thus, I would suggest that indigenous peoples used the electoral system not only to exercise their right to «autonomy and self-rule» (Owensby 2008: 225) but, in some cases, to protect their economic survival. If factionalism was not revolutionary in either form or intent, its dialectical relationship with processes both within and outside of Huaquechula contributed to the social transformation of New Spain. To this end, Owensby (2008: 307) posits several alternative scenarios that are relevant not only to Huaquechula but too much of the central highlands. Suppose that indigenous peoples had not been able to challenge Spanish encroachment on their resources and abuse of their labor. Suppose that they had abandoned all hope in the law and simply surrendered to exploitation. Instead, indigenous peoples «took an active part in framing their lives and the colonial world more broadly» (Owensby 2008: 299).

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- Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 21: 5v. 1589: Al alcalde mayor de Izúcar, para que informe la causa porque cobra las rentas de unas tierras que pertenecen a los vecinos de Huaquechula, y dispone de ellos.
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- Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 375: 113v-114r. 1590: Para que el alcalde mayor de Izúcar informe sobre lo que agravan los de Huaquechula, y si don Juan de Arellano envía alguaciles al pueblo y con qué misión, para proveer lo conveniente.
- Indios, Vol. 5, Exp. 1: 70r. 1590: Para que en adelante el corregidor solamente use el mandamiento con declaración que ha de entrar en Huaquechula, siendo llamado para negocio particular.
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